

WHERE ARE YOU? (Genesis 3:9)

INTRODUCTION:

There is a song that was written in 1930 (music by Harry Ruby and lyrics by Burt Kalmar). It became a hit in 1931 and the basis of a musical in 1950. It had a chorus that went:

*Three little words, eight little letters, one glorious phrase
That simply means I love you*

"I love you." As Kalmar said, just three little words. But you can pack a lot of meaning into just three words. Three words can change a life:

- I love you
- It's a boy...or...It's a girl
- You are hired...or...You are fired
- I am sorry
- You will recover...or...It is incurable

For the next few weeks, I want to look at some three-word phrases from the Bible: three-word phrases that can change your life. Now, for the next two weeks, I'll not be preaching here. Sandy and I will be out of state at a family obligation in Colorado so Rick Sutton will be preaching here for those two Sundays. Many of you will remember Rick. He has preached here a few times before. He has done some magic for a Youth Sunday a couple of years ago. And he led a seminar on the cults and the occult as he has to face them in his work as a prison chaplain in Pinkneyville Correctional Center. I think everyone enjoys and appreciates Rick and I trust you will support Rick and the church in my absence. I believe Rick will also be preaching about three little words from Scripture.

On March 8, when I return to the pulpit, I will be preaching on the three words "Choose For Yourself". The next week: "Here Am I". And the last sermon in this brief series will be March 22: "Come, Lord Jesus".

But for this week, to launch this mini-series, I wanted to turn to Genesis 3:9.

Adam and Eve had been placed in a perfect circumstance, including a perfect relationship with God. But they spoiled it by their sin. You will probably recall that when they sinned, they hid from God.

God longed for fellowship and relationship with the man and the woman that He had created in His own likeness and in His own image so Genesis 3:9 records that God sought his people by calling to them, "Where are you?"

It was the power of guilt that caused man to hide. And it was the power of love that caused God to seek him. It may be that, today, guilt is keeping you from God. And it may be that, today, God, in infinite love, is calling the same three words to you: "Where are you?"

To fully appreciate those three little words, we must first of all understand that:

I. THE DECISION TO SIN CREATES GUILT

There are a lot of misquoted maxims. Have you ever heard someone say that money is the root of all evil? Typically, people who say that, think that it comes from the Bible. What the Bible says is that the LOVE of money is the root of all kinds of evil.

Similarly, people often say that a person is innocent until he is proven guilty. Some people even believe that the phrase is enshrined in some foundational political document. It cannot be found in the Magna Carta, the English Bill of Rights of 1689, the Declaration of Independence, or in the Constitution of the United States. The earliest citation of this legal right seems to be in the 1895 Supreme Court decision in a case titled "Coffin versus The United States."

There is no need to go into detail about Coffin v. United States but suffice it to say that this court decision established the legal precedent that the accused is to be presumed innocent until there is substantial proof of guilt.

Notice one important word in that phrase: the accused is presumed innocent until he is proven guilty. Guilt is not something that a court creates. Guilt is created by a person's actions.

So it was in the Garden of Eden. Eve chose to eat from the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. She gave it to Adam and he also chose to eat that which was forbidden. It was their choice that created their guilt.

In the same way, we become guilty when we choose to disobey the Lord. As James put it in his letter:

¹³ When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

James makes it quite clear that the responsibility for sin rests with the sinner. The sequence is this:

1. I choose to entertain evil desires, to savor them and to indulge in them until they become implanted in my mind, my heart and my soul.

2. After I have entertained those evil desires, I am enticed by them and lured into sin.
3. Having chosen to allow inappropriate desires to become implanted in my mind and then having allowed those desires to grow until they mature into sin, that embryo of sin develops full term and finally gives birth to...death.

And it all starts with my choice. I am guilty because of what I did. We all are. And we know that to be true. The reason we feel guilty is because we are guilty.

II. **A SENSE OF GUILT CAN CREATE SHAME**

My decision to sin is what created my guilt. And my guilt can create shame.

Lewis B. Smedes has written a powerful book with the title, "Shame and Grace: Healing the Shame We Don't Deserve". Smedes draws an important distinction between the concepts of guilt and shame.

Guilt is the objective reality that we have disobeyed. We've disobeyed our parents or our partners, we've disobeyed the law, we've disobeyed God, and the result is that we are guilty. We are guilty of breaking the rules.

Shame, on the other hand, is guilt that has been personalized and internalized. I can and should feel guilty for what I have done. But I ought not to feel ashamed of who I am.

The first family in the Garden of Eden hid themselves from God. When God found them and asked them why they were hiding, they acknowledged that it was because they were ashamed. It was not that they were ashamed of what they had done: they were ashamed of themselves.

Many a parent has told a child, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself." And, sadly, many a child has obeyed. Instead of feeling a healthy guilt because of what he has done, many a child has felt ashamed of himself. The result can be low self-esteem and even, eventually, a conviction that he doesn't deserve to be loved, doesn't deserve to succeed and, in extreme cases, doesn't deserve to live.

Satan loves for us to feel ashamed of ourselves because we cannot regard ourselves as children of God, created in His image, and still feel shame about who we are.

Let me illustrate. I need a volunteer to come up here: a volunteer who wants a five-dollar bill. OK, now I'm going to give you this five-dollar

bill...but not yet. First, I want to crumple it up. There. Do you still want it? Why? What is it worth to you? It is still worth five-dollars? It is still worth five-dollars because what has happened to it has not changed its value. And if I get it really dirty? It is still worth five-dollars. And if I stomp on it and grind it down, it is still worth five-dollars. Even if I were to chew it up and spit it out, it would still be worth five-dollars. It is worth five-dollars because that is its value. The value of the currency is not based on its condition but on what is printed on the face of it.

Do you get the point? Your worth is not diminished because of what has happened to you. It is not diminished because of how dirty you've been. When you feel like the world has trampled you under foot, ground you down, chewed you up and spit you out, that still does not affect your value. Your value is determined by the fact that you have God's image on you. God's image determines your face value and you were created in His likeness and made in His image.

So, again, Satan loves for us to feel ashamed of ourselves because we cannot regard ourselves as children of God, created in His image, and still feel shame about who we are.

When we disobey God, we ought to feel guilty...because we are. But we ought not to feel ashamed of who we are because we are still God's kids and the objects of His unconditional love.

III. **A SENSE OF SHAME CAN CREATE A BARRIER BETWEEN US AND GOD**

I have already alluded to this but let me say it most clearly. A sense of shame created a barrier between Adam and Even and the God who loved them. In their shame, they hid from the very One who loved them most.

Haven't you had that experience? You know you have done wrong and you not only feel guilt about what you have done, you feel shame about who you are. You might beat yourself up with phrases like:

- "I must be an idiot to have done something so stupid."
- "I'm a failure, a total failure. I've done this so often before and the last time I did this, I promised God I would never ever do it again. I'm a total failure. I'm just a loser."
- "I must be the worst person on earth, to have done such a horrible thing."
- "That's it. I've done it now. I've sinned so much and I've sinned so seriously that I'm hopeless."

All such talk brings joy to the wicked heart of Satan. Because as long as you feel like that about yourself, there is an insurmountable barrier

between you and your Heavenly Father. When Adam and Eve were ashamed of themselves, they hid from God. And when you've been ashamed of yourself, you've probably hid from God, too.

It is hard to read the Bible when you are ashamed of yourself. It is hard to pray when you are ashamed of yourself. It is hard to gather with the Christians and worship God when you are ashamed of yourself. Your sense of shame creates a barrier that God never intended.

And while you cower in shame in the shadow of that wall, God cries out, "Where are you?" God is all-knowing so it is not as if you have fooled Him in some game of hide-and-seek. God knows where you've been hiding and He knows why. But He cries out to you in hopes that you will hear His plaintive call and come out to Him.

CONCLUSION:

"Where are you," cries your Father in Heaven. "Where are you?" In fact, He is calling to you today.

"Where are you?" Are you cowering in fear, afraid of what God might say to you? Afraid of what God might do to you?

"Where are you?" Are you hiding from His holiness because being in His presence causes you even greater awareness of your guilt, your blame, your responsibility for your condition?

"Where are you?" Are you lying defeated in the fetid waste of your best efforts to try harder, do better and be good to the very best of your ability? But you've found that the best of your ability is still not good enough and you've given up and quit trying?

"Where are you?"

"Where are you?" This is not the question of the detective who is trying to solve the crime. God knows who committed the crime. He knows who sinned.

"Where are you?" This is not the cry of the grief-stricken parent who has lost sight of his child and cannot imagine where he could be. Your Heavenly Father knows where you are.

"Where are you?" This is the call of the One who knows you best and loves you most.

"Where are you?" This is the plea of the One who longs to lure you from the shadows so you can live in His light.

“Where are you?” This is the heartfelt cry of the One who has great good news that He wants to share with you. And here is the great good news:

- Guilt is objective: we have either broken God’s laws or we have not and the truth is, we are all guilty because we have all broken God’s laws.
- Shame is subjective: it is the way we feel about ourselves because of our guilt.
- Now hear this: When Jesus died on the cross, he provided the cure for both. He forgave our sin so we could become not-guilty. Then he accepted us into the church, a fellowship of other forgiven people, so we would no longer feel shame. With that, our relationship with God is healed and we are in harmony with Him. Now that is worth celebrating!

“Where are you?” Wouldn’t you love to be able to answer, “I am in Christ? I am a part of the fellowship of the unashamed.”

“Where are you?” Don’t you want to say, “I am en route to heaven? I am on my way home because ‘His child and forever I am’.”

You can come out of your place of hiding when you know you are redeemed. Will you?

INVITATION: #516 – “Redeemed”